

[Mrs. Emma Kelly Davenport]

Words #15

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by

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Pioneer Life before 1875 and after UVALDE COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

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Mrs. Emma Kelly Davenport

Sabinal, Texas

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The little, gray-haired mother of ten children who, herself, was born and reared in the Sabinal Canyon in 1864, and who played as a child in the river that is beloved because of its frontier history, is living today in the town of Sabinal. Her children, likewise, were brought up on the Sabinal River and trained for ranch life just as she and her brothers were.

Possessing a more than ordinary education for pioneers of that day, it has served her purpose in recording facts and data which her excellent memory can now enlarge upon. As a young woman, she had the uncommon trait of keeping diaries, keepsakes and historical mementos. Belt buckles worn by her father and her husband's father as soldiers in the Confederacy; powder horns and valuable documents contribute to the interesting lore of early days.

The following incidents are told in her own words:

"My mother, Nancy Williams, was born in Perry County, Illinois, the daughter of Milton Williams. Her grandfather, Robert Williams, fought under General George Washington in the Revolutionary War. When she was very young, her parents brought her to live in Arkansas and there is where she later married my father, Chris Kelly, on Dec. 24, 1847 near the town of Siercy in White County. In 1851, they moved to Kaufman County, Texas, and in 1853 they came to the Sabinal Canyon where I was born nearly eleven years later, August 27, 1864.

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"You see, she was only about nineteen years old when she came out here and though it was about a year before the Indians began giving them serious trouble, it became necessary after that, oft' times for my mother to go to the field with my father and hold her baby and his gun while he worked.

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"My parents began ranching as soon as they got to the Sabinal Canyon. They had brought their horses and cattle and wagons with them and other members of his family had come along, also. In fact, there was a train of them. One wagon was provided for my mother and I think it was a little finer than the other wagons. She had her own bedding and personal things in that wagon. My daddy had a mischivous brother along in the wagon train and he tormented everything and everybody. His name was Jack Kelly. One day, he was riding in my mother's wagon and kept teasing her. She got tired of it after awhile and took off her shoe and threw it at him. She hit him right on the nose and it sure drew the blood. My daddy would have whipped him right there, but the whole wagon train took up for him and wouldn't have stood for it because they knew his mischief was all in fun.

"The trip was made in ordinary time but the roads those days were simply awful. Scarcely more than a trail over the rough mountains or across long-stretches of muddy prairie kept them from making more than eight or ten miles a day lots of times. A heap of times, they had to lie over for the swollen creeks and rivers to go down so they could cross.

"My daddy was always in the saddle and was always with the other settlers on the cow hunts. In 1870, he decided to take a herd of cattle to California, so he and Gid Thompson went together and threw their herds together. Gid's two boys, Hy and Bob, went along. The reason for selecting California was because of there being so much 3 money out there after that gold rush. Cattle here was fat for they had open range and plenty of water. They knew it would take a long time to make that trip, so they prepared for it. They bought up different small herds around in the country and got together about 3,000 head.

"Indians had to be taken into consideration at this time because they were constantly coming into the settlements and robbing and stealing. My father had narrowly missed ambushed by them more than once. He decided that it would be safer to leave his family at Uvalde even though it was only a village, for there were soldiers down at Fort Inge and it was far better protection against the Indians.

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"John Davenport (whom I was later to marry) and others of the neighborhood stayed up at the ranch headquarters the night before the herd left on the trail. They went with the outfit for one day's travel. The last night we stayed at home, which was this same night, the boys were all camped around to start before day the next morning. The camp was awakened by my father singing that old song: "Wake up, wake up, you drowsy sleepers Wake up, wake up, it's almost day! How can you lie and sleep and slumber When your true love is going away!"

"I guess that was pretty hard on my mother, for she realized that he would be gone a year or two, if he came back alive at all. No one knew whether they would ever get through or not and it was hard to give them up.

"It took them two days to go from headquarters, here on the Sabinal, to Uvalde and we camped one night with them on the way to Uvalde. I remember that one of the cowboys caught me up and stood me up on the sugar barrel next morning. It was a barrel of brown sugar they were taking along with their provisions.

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"My father left us a new wagon and team of horses and money enough to live on two years. He left us in a rented house and after he was gone about two months, my mother built a new house in the west part of town near where the Main Street School is now. We had taken everything we had from the ranch except a few milk cows and some hogs.

"I was soon old enough to go to school and my first school days were at Uvalde. My teacher was Old Judge McCormick. He was gray-headed and a middle-aged man then and all his days, didn't change his appearance much. He was tolerably strict in school but he was a great sport when it come to attending horse races or other sports. He was a great drinker too. I remember he was always ready for ball games and he said that John Davenport could throw a ball farther than any man he ever saw.

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"He told me that he never went to school over six months in the year in his life and that a boy could get a good education if he would go six months and really try to learn. He said his school came in three-months sessions at a time. He taught many a person in this country and he trained lots of men to different trades. He was a good surveyor and he taught that trade to John Davenport. They surveyed out many a section in this country and my understanding is that they helped survey out the town of Uvalde. He had a fine compass and Jacob's staff and chain and before the old Judge died, he presented that very same compass to my husband and now it is owned by my son, Rollie Davenport. It is a fine instrument and as good as ever.

"After my father was gone awhile my sister, Sarah, married George Dillard and George's sister married at the same time so they had a big double wedding and 'in-fair.' That was down in the Patterson settlement on the Sabinal. I think everybody in the country came and helped celebrate.

"It was at this very place, later on, that George Dillard dubbed me a tomboy because I could run like a race horse. I could outrun any of the school boys in the whole country, unless it was Charley Harper and I could run right with him. George Dillard decided to put a pair of pants on me and I had always been taught it was a disgrace for a girl to put on men's clothing, so naturally I felt that I would be disgraced for life if such a thing were done. Well, he set out after me one day to catch me but he would have had to be horseback to have done it. I took to the open pasture and I remember going over hills and down them as I circled around to get back to the house. He found out he couldn't catch me. Not having any sisters near my age, I had played with the boys in their games till I was a good runner.

"Not long ago, Ben Biggs from Seattle, Washington, came down here and he said he often thought of me because of a broken finger he got when we were kids and he was chasing me and fell. We were playing school and he undertook to catch me as I crossed the road

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close to the school house. He fell as he went across and hit his finger on the ground and broke it. The finger grew back crooked as a remembrance to me.

“We stayed down at the Patterson settlement a few months after my sister married. We felt safer down there than we did at Uvalde. We were scared to death the whole time we lived in Uvalde. That certainly was a wild place if there ever was one. Rangers and soldiers would come in there and get on wild sprees. They would get into fights and shoot up the town. It surely wasn't safe to go up town after dark. I've gone under the bed many a time when I was little and all that shooting was going on. Once, there was a terrible commotion and shooting up town and the next morning we found out the cause of it. Two gamblers by the name of Asberry and Young were killed. They were men who had not been living there long and had no families. They were hard drinkers and gamblers and got into a fight with each other. Men would fall out with their very best friends in a gambling game. One of the men drew his gun and killed the other and they took both of them to jail — the dead one and the wounded one. But someone went to jail and killed the other one.

“It wasn't an uncommon thing for a cowboy fight or soldier and ranger fight to occur up town. There was saloons and places for them to have trouble and it often happened. There were so many outlaws and bad men in through here then, that men in this section went armed for years; the old and young — even boys 12 and 13 years old had pistols buckled on them. Many a time when a killing occurred, the killer ran away and more often than not, made a clean get-away.

“My mother's life was a busy one after we moved to Uvalde. She had a bunch of children to care for and the cooking, mending, sewing, soapmaking, washing, ironing and milking cows went right on. She started a garden right at once after we moved there and she bought the first cook stove I ever saw. It didn't lack much of being the first one in the town, either. That stove had the regular four-eye too but two back eyes were elevated about four inches. I remember the fine bread and cakes she could cook on it.

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"When cool weather came along, mother wanted to go back to kill her hogs up on the ranch and put up her meat and lard. Mrs. Thompson decided to go along too, for she had moved to Uvalde to live while Mr. Thompson was gone, the same as we had. They got two neighbor boys to go along horseback and they put all us children in the wagon and we started out. We had gone about forty miles up in the canyons and when we reached Nolton 7 Creek on Uvalde Prairie, we noticed a mounted Indian leading another horse. I remember that the horse he was leading seemed a little crippled and I think he tied/ him and stopped to try to make out what we were doing or how many men there were. My mother told my two oldest brothers to get out and get two long sticks and get on the horses that were hitched to the wagon. They did so and then she told the two boys that were horseback to tie their lariats to the tongue of the wagon and start out. She had all of us children sit up in the wagon with hats on to make us look like men or big boys. Mrs. Thompson was frightened and was afraid that we were all going to be killed, but my mother told her to have faith in the Lord and all would be well. She was a courageous woman and one of the calmest and most serene persons I ever knew. She wasn't easy to get ruffled. Her scheme worked like magic because the Indian couldn't tell for sure how many men there were for it looked like there were four mounted men, armed with guns. Indians knew that men with rifles could do business in those days.

"My mother finally sold her home in Uvalde and moved back up to our ranch before my father ever returned from California. I was going to school up there, then. I have heard them talk about my father coming home by boat, so I suppose he took a train from California to St Louis, and then went by boat down the Mississippi to New Orleans and then around by Galveston for I do know that he landed at Galveston and came on up to Houston. It took him a long time to make that trip and we hadn't had a letter from him in no telling when. The day he came in, my mother had gone down below to stay all night with my oldest sister. She rode horseback down there and left me at a neighbor's house. I saw two men come up the road horseback but I never knew it was my daddy till he went on home and my brother came down in a run in a little while and told me that he was

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there. We had looked for him so long, I ran like a race horse to get to where he was. I had forgotten about an old mean, fighting cow we had. We always had to keep out of her way for she would run you or fight anything. Well, I ran right into her face before I saw her. She tossed her head and I tossed over the fence. Gracious, I sure did run then. When I got to where I could see my daddy, he was standing in the door and when he saw me, he reached up and caught the top of the door facing and began dancing. I tell you we were all so happy we couldn't behave. He got on his horse then and rode on down to my sister's where my mother was. They said it was a great meeting with mother crying and clinging to him. She just couldn't stop crying.

“He brought back a mint of money from that trip and told many an interesting experience they had on their way out there. He said that Old Man Ben Biggs and his boys, Jim and Billy, were several hundred miles ahead of them with about six-hundred head of cattle. They had about the same experiences crossing the desert and strips of country without water as the Biggs outfit had had. I heard him say that when they got to California and they needed to go into town—I think it was San Diego—and they were all so ragged and torn up and threadbare that none of them would have dared try to go into town looking like that. Not a one of them had a decent pair of pants left to go into town after provisions and clothes for the other fellows. But John Taylor met the emergency. He took the wagon sheet and cut out a pair of pants with a butcher knife. I suppose his leggings hid the stitches. I think they had a needle or two and some twine or coarse thread along. The boys thought it was a good idea. They were all so shaggy, with long hair and beard and so dirty they were longing to get into town for a clean-up. Well, John Taylor saved the day and went into town with his handmade duck pants and he bought clothes for the other boys and brought them out 9 so they could all go in to town.

“Even after my father got back to Texas, the Indians were still pilfering and stealing horses. He was taking us across the country one time from Uvalde to the ranch and we stopped at one of our places at the Blue Water hole for the night. There was a house there and we were going to spend the night there before going on in home. We unloaded the wagon

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and went into the house and my father turned the horses loose and they hardly got ten steps before the Indians had them. We didn't know it until next morning, but we saw by the tracks what had happened. My father had to walk about ten miles to get another team to take us on up to our home.

“[??] after his return from California, my father began making preparations for another trip up the trail — this time to Kansas with a herd. Our lives were pretty easy from that time on for he made the trip and made lots of money. Then when he began making plans for a third trip, my mother set her foot down on it. She told him she was tired of staying alone and raising babies and calves while he was always gone. He didn't make the trip either.

“As my father was strictly a stockman, he lived on a ranch till his death. In a few years after his cattle drives, he began experimenting with sheep and was very successful in handling them. I was partly fed on sheep meat and as my winter clothing came from the sheep's back, I like sheep to this day. I remember that sheep shearing time was surely a busy time for us. Sometimes there would be fifteen or twenty shearers come at one time and if the weather was good, they could soon do the work. They were generally Mexicans and there nearly always was a musician with them. They are great people to sing and play a guitar and we always loved to hear them. Once, there was a shearer with the crew who could imitate any kind of animal 10 or bird he had ever heard. All of us children tried to do the same thing and we certainly made a racket if nothing else. One day one of the shearers spoke to me in Spanish and said he was going to cut off one of my curls. I didn't understand him, and made a dash for the house, scared to death, and told my mother that he said he was going to cut my head off. After they found out why I ran, they laughed at the joke on me, and tried every way to make friends with me but I stayed off at a distance and watched. Even their gifts of peloncillos (pe-lon-cios) sent to me by my brothers didn't win my confidence any more.

“I went to school mostly up where Utopia is now. As I grew up, I took part more and more in the programs we usually had on Friday afternoons and we nearly always had visitors.

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Boys who liked certain school girls were pretty sure to be there. Two of my girl friends and myself got to where we expected certain boys to be there for the program. John Davenport always came after me on Friday evenings and he would get me and his girl cousin in the buggy and go to the store. He would buy a pound of candy for us and it would be wrapped up in paper as we had never seen candy put up in boxes then. We would drive on to his cousin's house and let her out, then we would go back to my home. I lived a mile north of the school and she lived a mile south of it and though he always drove pretty, fine-trotting horses, I noticed he didn't hurry them after we let his cousin out of the buggy and started back to my home.

"Our parents were always strict about letting us go anywhere and we weren't allowed to go to parties on school days; only on Friday or Saturday nights. I was thinking lots of John Davenport about then, even though I was only 14 years old. I thought he was the handsomest thing I ever had seen and I felt sure that he wanted to marry me, but 11 he hadn't asked me yet. There was another girl over about D'Hanis that I knew he had been interested in and I would hear different reports about it at times, but he seemed so much in love with me when we were together, I would always forget that there might be someone else.

"The school days wore on toward an end that year and I must confess that I made my worst grades. I had always made such good grades but the last year, I nearly failed. My mind was on John Davenport too much. However, I was very enthusiastic toward the close of the term and tried to catch up on my grades and practiced speeches and parts for the programs to be given at the close of school. One afternoon, I was sitting under the arbor out at the side of the schoolhouse and I don't suppose any one knew I was there. I happened to be looking right down the trail when I saw Andrew Spencer [?] meet his stepfather and kill him. It was an old score settled for Andrew said his mother had been terribly mistreated and he had told his stepfather that if he ever attempted to speak to him, he would kill him. Andrew's mother died and his stepfather married again and was living with his second wife when Andrew killed him. I don't know what they said to each

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other but Andrew shot him down and there was a terrible confusion around there then and somebody gave Andrew a horse to leave on. He pulled out right over to Uvalde and gave himself up. He didn't stay in jail very long and when he was tried, he came clear.

"Well, at the close of the last year of my schooling, we had a May Party. On a vote, I was elected queen and all the attendants were chosen. I remember that I was all dressed up in a white organdy with fluted ruffles. They took our old piano box and decorated it up with flowers for a throne. I had flowers on me too and my attendants were all decorated with flowers. When all the girls came in 12 and made their speeches to me and handed me their septres and wands, I jumped up and said,

"AMEN!

And heaven support us too!

'Tis much we mighty people have to do —'

There was more to it and I went right through the whole speech, but my eye was roving over the crowd to see if a certain cowboy had arrived. Being fixed up my prettiest, it was natural that I wanted him to see that ceremony where I was crowned queen. A little later that evening, I got a letter from him saying that on that day he would be taking a bunch of cattle to San Antonio and didn't think he could possibly get there. I was the worst disappointed girl in the world. But after all, he did get there before it was all over and we went to a dance from there. We didn't stay late because my father objected to dances at a public place.

"They never let us to to every dance that come along, either. I remember I had a hard time getting to go to all the dances I wanted to. I have gone with my brothers horseback, far and near, and have even ridden behind them on their horse just to get to go. Of course, that would only be for a short distance, but no matter how close a dance was, we most always rode horseback to it. My parents gave a dance occasionally and they were always

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largely attended. It was customary to dance nearly all night and they would serve coffee and cake or cookies through the night to the guests. And how they could dance! They were always so graceful on the floor and I do know that John Davenport was the most graceful dancer I ever saw. I just thought I was IT if I could dance with him.

“He was rather timid in his younger days and while he was with me, he didn't ask me to marry him. He waited till he left and was on a cow hunt down the country, then wrote me a letter. He said he had 13 meant to ask me but his heart failed him and he had been told that my parents objected to my marrying anyway. I wrote him back that I intended to marry whom I wanted and would not try to please my parents about it if a question arose. We considered ourselves engaged then and I was only 14, as I told you. He came to see me as often as he could but he nearly always came in a buggy so he could take me places.

“While we were engaged, myself and two other girls and our three boy friends, chaperoned by my married sister and her husband, took a trip to San Antonio that summer. We rode in two hacks drawn by horses as there was no railroad west of San Antonio then. Our first night out, we stayed at Hondo with a friend. The boys spent the night in the hack and used the blankets and pillows we carried along. The rest of the party slept in the house. The next night found us in Castroville and we secured rooms and a place to put the teams. We went then to see the Catholic churchhouse which was practically new. It was a stone building, and beautifully decorated on the inside. I see that same church now when I pass through there going to San Antonio and though it shows marks of age, it still serves the purpose for which it was intended. I think that church was the first to be built west of San Antonio.

“The third night found us in San Antonio. We went out window-shopping, then took a ride on the street car which was drawn by little Spanish mule. The little mule had a bell on its neck which was a good signal that the street car was coming. He didn't have to pull the car all the time as they had other miles stationed along the way so that they could put fresh

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ones to the car at different stops and let the tired one rest. Sometimes the passengers would have to push to get the car started if the car was heavily loaded.

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"We were out for a sight-seeing, so we went up to San Pedro Springs on the street car. The fare was cheap but the travel was slow. I'll say, though, that the street car reached its destination safely. We were anxious to see the zoo that was out there. It was a pit dug about ten or twelve feet square and contained a bear, a wolf and a coon. I don't remember any other animals, but they had just what we had seen all our lives and we thought it was a splendid zoo. There were water fowls, such as ducks and geese, and a good collection of fish.

"But mosquitoes! I couldn't sleep at all. There were no screens, of course, for we had never heard of anyone screening their houses then. Well, we made it through the night and was glad when it was over. We got up ready for more sight-seeing. We felt that we should spend one whole day in the city to make our trip more satisfactory. We were determined that we would visit an ice cream parlor and eat some ice cream. As for myself, I had never seen any ice cream in mid-summer. I had been having a slight toothache that day and was trying to forget it, but the first bite of ice cream I took, settled the fun with me till I went to the dentist.

"We went to see the Government tower that day. It wasn't finished but it was the tallest building I had ever seen. We went straight up the stairway, then the steps began to wind. It looked too high for me and there was so much unfinished woodwork, that we decided to come down. We went over to Frost's National Bank and then to Oppenheimer's store and a few other places where we bought some new things for one of the girls who was going to get married later on.

"It was just such a trip as this that my mother and father took to San Antonio after supplies once. It took five days to make a trip to San Antonio and back and if it was muddy, it took

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a whole week. Well, 15 they loaded up their wagon with the necessary supplies and they started home. My mother had bought a great assortment of dry goods and of course, on the way back, it was a long trip and many a hour of just plodding along watching the road. Having to stop to cook meals along the way and to let the team eat and rest, my mother wanted something to do. She hadn't brought her scissors along, but she hit on another plan of making a dress out of some of the material she had bought. Here is where another butcher knife came into play as a dressmaker's tool. She just cut out her dress with a sharp butcher knife and started to work on it and had the complete dress made by the time they got home.

"John Davenport and I married in 1878 and the first two or three years of our married life, we lived on a cow ranch. We had stock of our own and were on my father's place on the Sabinal River. I reckon I have lived on, at least, seven or eight different places on the Sabinal River. We run the J W D brand, which was John's brand when we married. The J was on the shoulder, the W on the side and the D on the hip. My brand was EMA on the side, for you see I had stock of my own on my father's ranch too.

"John continued on the cow hunts. The country was not entirely fenced up yet and they used to go on roundups and take pack-horses along. They would take a sack of biscuits, some bacon and coffee, sometimes a frying pan and coffee pot. If it was a lasting job, they probably would take two pack-horses to the outfit and maybe a wagon. They would round up from the head of the Sabinal and go down the country a good ways and meet other outfits that were on the east and west. I have seen many a roundup thrown together and I have seen the ranchmen marking and branding at the roundups and driving their stock home. Everybody was after the Mavericks. The first man to get his rope on him got him. They have penned in our corrals many a time but they hardly ever come to the house for their meals because they had their own camp outfit with them. You 16 would see all those cowboys and men with their guns on them working right along in the hot dusty pens. Most ranchmen kept their girls and wives away from the pens when an outfit was working there,

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and most of them hardly ever went to the pens except for some home work where they were needed awhile.

“If the cow hunts went on longer then was expected, John would generally ride in again in two or three days and get some more biscuits. He kept a sack tied on his saddle. They would ride all day and when they went to eat, they would always have fresh beef and biscuits.

“We pre-empted a place of our own and went to running sheep with our cattle. I was used to sheep and loved to handle them. We nearly raised six of our children on that place for they were old enough to go to school. The children were always tickled to death when their daddy would ride in after he had been gone awhile. I always felt like I was one of the children myself, I was so young when I married. At least, he petted me as much as he did one of the children and we were sweethearts all our married life.

“We stayed in the sheep business on up to the last few years of his life. While the children were small, we would have to move closer to school at times or maybe to town, then move back to the ranch. But we kept a teacher at home when they were right little. We had a governess there the time we lost our little boy. We had gone out on the river that day and the children were all playing around. Little Georgie went to climb up on a log while they were running around, and there was a rattlesnake lying under it. It bit him on the ankle and we grabbed him up right then and bound his leg and started for the doctor. One of the boys ran to the house and got a chicken and we split it open and laid it on the bite. John drove the horses in a run and I sat in the back and held him and I 17 also held that chicken on his little ankle. We got to the doctor and he had everything that could be done or that he knew to do. We worked with him all night but we lost him just at sunrise the next morning. I talked to that doctor later and he told me he had never lost but one other child from a snake bite since that time. My next baby was a girl and I named her Georgia as a namesake of the little one we lost.

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"We used to do lots of our visiting after supper. Many a time, we have gone to see my mother or John's mother after supper or maybe to some neighbor's. We always went in a buggy or a hack. I think back now on how I used to go with John down to his mother's place east of Sabinal and the next morning, we would be hurrying to get off and I never helped with the breakfast dishes or any of the work. She insisted that she would clean up after we got off, but I wouldn't do that now if it was to do over.

"John loved to sing and he loved music in every way. His mother liked music the same way and she could play the violin pretty good. She always loved to see her children and grandchildren come and always had something good for them to eat. She lived on the highway between San Antonio and Sabinal, about two miles east of the present town of Sabinal. For years she kept a store there and the freighters and travelers always stopped with her. There is where I saw so many ox trains and mule trains pass by. Freighters hauled cotton to Mexico in season and I have seen bales piled up on the wagons as long as they could get one on. Sometimes the Mexicans would come by from Mexico with [paloncillos?] and [quinect?] to sell. And I have seen them peddling red-birds — just ordinary red-birds that are wild. You could put them in a cage and feed them cracked corn and water, and they would just whistle and whistle for you. Those peddlers oft' times had fancy needle-work and beautiful drawn work that must have taken them weeks to make. It was always rather cheap too. The country was getting 18 more thickly settled then and the menace of Indians was over.

"We stayed in the sheep business up to the last few years of John's life. We put in a two-hundred acre farm at the foot of the hills and continued on with our cattle and sheep. Later, we leased out our farm and ranch and moved to Sabinal to this home I live in now and where John died in 1926. All of our ten children were there: Jim, Raymond, McCormick (Connie, who died a short while after) Rollie, Lila, Georgia, Ira, Davie and Newell. Since he passed away, I have been blessed with having the children all around me. I miss the old life and I love to see all the old-timers in this country whenever we [?]. I have long wanted

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a record made of these things I have told you and that is why I have preserved dates and other data which I have showed you.”

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